



Southeast and Caribbean Regional Team Accomplishment: Serving the Caribbean

The Caribbean region is vulnerable to a variety of natural and man-made stressors that affect public health and safety, natural resources, and economic development. Among these challenges are climate change and sea level rise, extreme weather and tsunamis, degradation of coral reefs, depletion of fishery resources, and rapid growth and development. In response, NOAA is at work in the region helping decision makers address these challenges through applying sound science, monitoring and forecasting environmental conditions, managing natural resources, and improving the resilience of island communities.

To enhance NOAA's responsiveness to Caribbean region needs, **NOAA's Southeast and Caribbean Regional Team (SECART)** has worked to foster collaboration with partners and constituents, better integrate NOAA products and services, and promote greater regional awareness and understanding of NOAA's priorities and capabilities. Illustrating this service to the region is the SECART-sponsored **NOAA in the Caribbean Initiative**, developed to enhance collaboration among NOAA offices and partners working in the U.S. Caribbean. In 2011, a 15-member steering committee was assembled to define and coordinate this initiative, with representatives from every NOAA line office. This network of NOAA employees and Caribbean partners is the first of its kind in the region and has begun to strengthen NOAA's regional responsiveness and coordination with constituents.

The new **NOAA in the Caribbean Newsletter** was developed by the NOAA in the Caribbean steering committee as a means to more deliberately and routinely inform and engage partners and constituents. This electronic newsletter has already reached nearly 500 readers, and is in its third quarterly distribution. Following this successful outreach effort, SECART and the steering committee designed and hosted the first annual **NOAA in the Caribbean Partners Meeting, held in St Thomas** in May 2012. This meeting established a novel forum to collectively discuss strategic priorities and challenges, plus opportunities for greater collaboration and resource leveraging across the region. Congresswoman Donna Christensen (D-VI) opened the meeting by saying, "This gathering gives us an opportunity to be a part of a developing strategy for protecting and improving our ocean and coastal ecosystems, addressing climate change, and ensuring the economic viability of this region." She also reinforced the need for connecting NOAA and local partners through face to face forums in order to keep up with opportunities and challenges.



Congresswoman Donna Christensen addresses the NOAA in the Caribbean meeting

Recognizing not only the importance of improved coordination in the region but also a mechanism to plan strategically to address priorities, NOAA has developed a draft **NOAA Caribbean Strategy**. This is a NOAA-wide strategic approach to better address regional issues and improve mission effectiveness and international cooperation in the Caribbean. SECART and the NOAA in the Caribbean steering committee have provided leadership, critical information, and review capacity in developing this document. Through the Strategy, NOAA will be better able to both contribute to, and benefit from, a sustained and coordinated regional presence. Completion of this document will be a significant step for NOAA and the Caribbean region.

To be fully successful, NOAA must collectively plan for and support the tactics needed for execution, including integrating capabilities and leveraging resources to address common objectives. The intentional coordination and activities pursued through SECART, NOAA in the Caribbean, and the NOAA Caribbean Strategy help enable and form the basis for a targeted, corporate-level, and integrated response to Caribbean region needs.